
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1738 Park Road, NW	
Meeting Date:	November 1, 2012	(x) Alterations
Case Number:	12-624	(x) Addition
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicant, owner 1738 Park Road LLC (with Sutton Yantis Associates, architects), requests the Board's concept review of a proposal to:

- expand the third story rearward to the depth of the floors below (it's presently only about half as deep, and shares this characteristic with its immediate neighbors), extending the side bay up to the expanded third floor;
- add a three-story, frame, fourteen-by-fourteen-foot, three-story, rear addition with an unspecified siding, with attendant partial demolition of the house's rear wall;
- remove the two-story rear porch and replace it with another that wraps around the rear addition;
- add a roof deck and access-stair enclosure;
- introduce an exterior basement entrance with areaway along the west side of the house, entering on the forward side of the bay;
- replace one of the basement windows on the west side of the house with a larger opening containing double-ganged windows and an adjacent window well;
- close several windows on the west side;
- flip the main entry door—and the steps and opening in the porch balustrade—to the opposite end of the façade; and
- demolish a one-story garage and pave much of the rear yard for parking.

The building is one unit of a 1909 duplex, the near mirror-image of the attached house. It is among a series of similar and neighboring duplexes developed at the same time by Lewis E. Breuninger.

The intention is to covert the former single-family home to a four-unit condominium, with a unit on each level. In the R-4 zone, the size of this lot permits a conversion to a maximum of four units, although the simultaneous conversion and expansion of the building is a more ambiguous matter.

Evaluation

Roof addition

Adding atop a roof which is not the uppermost roof has been commonly approved by the Board. There are a number of homes elsewhere in Mount Pleasant, for instance, that have a third story not as deep as the floors below, and some of these have been added to with the Board's blessing. For that matter, adding atop a one-story wing behind a two-story house has been even more common, historically and in recent years.

While such additions are something of a hybrid between traditional rear additions and the more problematic roof additions, they are more like the former in that they fill a "gap" which resolves into a regular massing. And while rooftop additions are typically set forward of the rear wall to maintain the roofline of the rear of a row, the projection of the rear porch here manages to break up what otherwise might be a monolithic verticality of the rear wing.

The addition should, however, be subtly distinguished from the rest of the building, so that it is clear, at least on close inspection, that the new construction is not original and does not present a false history.

- The new brick should closely match the old in size, color, texture, coursing and joint color and profile, although there will likely be perceptible differences. But the new brick can meet the old, not by toothing in, but at a cold joint.
- Further, the cornice atop the side wall should not be repeated on the addition, resulting in one cornice over the other. Instead, the addition can have simple cap flashing.
- Most important, the side bay should not be stretched into a third story, but left as it is. In addition to it adversely affecting a character-defining feature and its original proportions, adding another story would obscure the joint between the old and new.

Rear addition

Also proposed is a rear addition, three stories tall and measuring fourteen by fourteen feet in footprint. It would be sided, distinct from the otherwise masonry building, but the material of the siding has not been specified. It would be wrapped by a two-story porch replacing the present porches.

Although quite tall, the addition is not terribly large in area and seems not incompatible with the house nor an unreasonable size for the immediate area. The impression of its height would be mitigated by the surrounding, lower porches.

- The connection to the addition from the main block does necessitate some demolition, and this should be limited to the degree feasible. The masonry rear wall can be retained in part, as at the bathroom walls on the first and second floors, but the drawings do not make clear if those are new partitions or walls left in place.

Roof deck

As suggested by the published guidance on roof additions and decks, a roof deck is acceptable if it can be made invisible from the street by setting back as necessary from the front and any exposed side of the house, and with the supporting structure not being prominent from the rear of the house. This applies to rooftop stair enclosures as well, which are now required for

emergency egress from a roof in a multi-family building. The depth of the main block, including the rooftop addition, provides sufficient area for a sizable deck, even pulled back. In fact, a stick test may prove that the deck can come farther forward on the house.

- In addition to the deck and its rail the stair enclosure must be recessed sufficiently so as not to be visible from Park Road. If they cannot be sufficiently pulled back, then they should not be approved. It appears that a little height might be taken out the stair enclosure, and its roof could be shaped to conform to the slope of the stair. A stick test, taking into consideration any necessary supporting framing, will be required. Of course, that test must take into consideration the height of any framing to support the deck.¹
- The deck should not be extended onto the new rear addition, as on that narrower piece, it would be very prominent as a balustrade around its perimeter (especially as now detailed), making that portion of the building taller and more prominent than the rest, rather than recessive behind the lower porches.

Access to basement

For the basement unit, the applicant proposes along the exposed side wall both an exterior stair in an areaway and a larger window opening and well for light and egress. The basement entrance would be through a door in the foundation of the bay. An existing basement window would be altered for a double-ganged opening and dropped below grade for both light into and egress from a basement bedroom. Both of these alterations would be prominently visible from the street.

The prominence of the areaway excavation, the consequent exposure of the foundation, and the rail around it can be mitigated or resolved by flipping the areaway to the rear of the bay, which has little effect on the interior or exterior plans or circulation.

The irony of a large window well in that location is that the rail, necessary to keep pedestrians from falling in, would impede egress. Such a well, rail, and expansion of the window opening are far from ideal, but probably acceptable for the purposes.

Other alterations to openings

The applicant proposes to close four of the windows on the side of the building, filling them with brick but retaining the arches. Some of the side windows would be truncated.

The main entry door would be shifted to the opposite side of the façade, taking with it the entrance stairs and the corresponding opening in the porch balustrade. The reason for the proposed move is the fact that the house's present and proposed main interior stairways are located on the east side of the house, against the party wall, while the entry door is on the opposite side. So, in order to avoid the upstairs residents having to pass across the front room of the main floor to get to the stairs—or alternatively, to avoid rebuilding the stairs against the windowed west wall—the applicant proposes the door switch.

¹ The present elevations show the roof and ceiling below as flat, which would not be easily drained. Of course, if that implies restructuring of the existing roof, that is another issue to consider. But there is a good change that the deck would be a largely independent superstructure.

The historic preservation design guidelines address such alterations:

Creating a new opening or enlarging an existing opening in a primary character-defining wall for a window, door, through-wall air conditioning unit or other reason is almost never appropriate. If a new opening must be created, for example to make a building functional, it should be located on a rear, non-character-defining wall. The size, design and detailing of the new opening should be compatible with the character of the wall.... Moving or blocking-up existing doors, or adding a new door to a historic building will almost always change its character. If located on the primary facade, it is critical that the proposed alteration not significantly change the character of the facade. Moving, blocking-up or adding a door on a secondary facade may be less critical to the character of the building.

Moving the door is especially problematic because this house is a mirror image of its attached neighbor. Further, the alteration affects more than the door itself. One has the option either to move the door and leave the steps and porch balustrade in place, or to move those elements to correspond. With the former option, a lot more original fabric has to be disturbed, and the reflection of the twin house is lost. In the latter, the door and its approach weirdly do not align.

- While it presents a real challenge to be accommodated in the floor plan, the door location should not change.

As for the side windows, closing or truncating them is never encouraged and, strictly speaking, the bedroom windows can be maintained even if that is the wall against which the beds are placed.

Altering the existing window pattern, either by changing their location or adding new windows to a façade, is strongly discouraged or should only be done after carefully considering the effect of the change on the overall character of a building... [I]t is almost never appropriate to close or cover-up an existing opening in a character-defining wall. [However, c]losing or covering-up openings in secondary walls may sometimes be appropriate if the material used is compatible with the wall....

However, with the brick recessed somewhat in the openings, and the arches retained, the window alterations are an acceptable, limited change to the side wall.

Rear-yard parking

The applicant proposes to demolish a nondescript, one-story, frame garage at rear and to pave much of the rear yard to provide four parking spaces and a leadwalk from the parking to and around the house. The demolition does not pose a preservation issue, but it must be done carefully, as the garage appears to be of a piece with the neighbor's.

So much paving is certainly not ideal (and will probably become more difficult in the future, with the phasing in of new zoning and environmental regulations), but the Board and staff have

generally approved rear-yard paving for off-alley parking, and the applicant intends to provide some landscaping to soften it.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board approve the concept as compatible with the character of the historic district and delegate to staff further review, with the conditions that:

- *the roof addition match the masonry of the rest of the house but be distinct by not continuing the third-story cornice across its parapet and by not replicating the bay projection at the third floor;*
- *the rear addition's siding be wood or fiber-cement horizontal siding, with an exposure not to exceed six inches;*
- *the roof deck and stair enclosures be pulled back from the front and side of the house, and the enclosure potentially lowered, so as not be visible from Park Road, to be determined by a stick test as necessary, and that the deck be pulled entirely off the rear addition;*
- *the basement entrance and areaway be flipped to the rear of the bay;*
- *the location of the front door not be changed;*
- *the rear yard have sufficient landscaping around the paved areas.*



